

**Rev. F. Vernon Wright**

**Moral Foundation for the Re-Authorization of Chip**

Senators, and Chair, thank you for providing me the opportunity to speak before you today. I am grateful that you have done so much to provide for the welfare and freedom of the citizens of this nation in the post 9-11 epoch.

I have been brought before you as an ordained United Church of Christ religious leader from Helena, MT. Today I wish to speak to the moral foundation of the country and its implications for children's health insurance. I, like many in the UCC, am a Congregationalist. We founded Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1600's. Fifteen of us were signers of the Declaration of Independence. Congregationalists defended the slaves on the Amistad, advocated for more human living conditions for immigrants in the turn of the century, labored for Civil rights in the 60's, and have continued to be advocates for the poor, the dispossessed and the disenfranchised. Today 37,000 Montana kids and 8.4 million US children have no health insurance and this constitutes a moral crisis. Standing firmly in a deep US religious and civic tradition, I would urge you to fully re-authorized chip and expand it if at all possible.

Jesus Christ, and the Hebrew prophetic tradition represented in the narrative of Jonah, for instance, had a new vision of humanity in which all human beings, elders, children, men, women, slaves, free, Jews, gentiles, were one in the eyes of God. Standing on the tradition of the Torah, where true worship of God is marked by justice and mercy, Christ taught that God's reign would become manifest when we serve the last and least out of loving

concern. And children at that time, just as they are today, truly were the last and the least, which is why he spends so much time welcoming them, healing them and loving them.

I have a young family and minister to many young families, so I am somewhat acquainted with their needs. Many children my ten and five year old sons go to school with are distracted because they are living with horrendous coughs and toothaches festering just long enough to warrant a trip to the emergency room. A child, whose only option for dealing with a toothache or walking pneumonia is the emergency room, is a child who lives in constant threat. According to many child psychologists, the brain does not develop well under threat and the greater the threat, the more severe the handicap. So each week my church gives money to families to buy food and medicine so that their future and the future of our community might not be diminished. But what we can afford is simply a drop in the bucket- it does not keep families from sliding down further and further into the pit of dysfunction. That is why we need a society that stands for something more than personal gain where the common concern is something larger than what the synagogue, mosque or church can provide alone.

Fortunately we do not stand alone in this conviction. It is out of this faithful concern that Jonathan Winthrop wished that this new Commonwealth truly would become a Beacon on a Hill and Light of the Nations. As he prayed to God for deliverance from a storm off that land which would become Boston,

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, *to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God*. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for

the supply of other's necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make other's conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labour and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we *keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace*. And so we must ask, what kind of light as a nation are we if a child without adequate health care? What kind of future are we providing for our children and the future of our nation when we allow for millions of American children to go un-insured. Truly as a nation, are we not headed for a shipwreck? I think the moral thing to do, is to not only re-authorize Chip, but begin to think about its expansion.